

A History of The State Library and Offices H25I



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Michigan's present Capitol, the state's third, opened on January 1, 1879, to great acclaim.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

The Golden Age of Capitol Construction

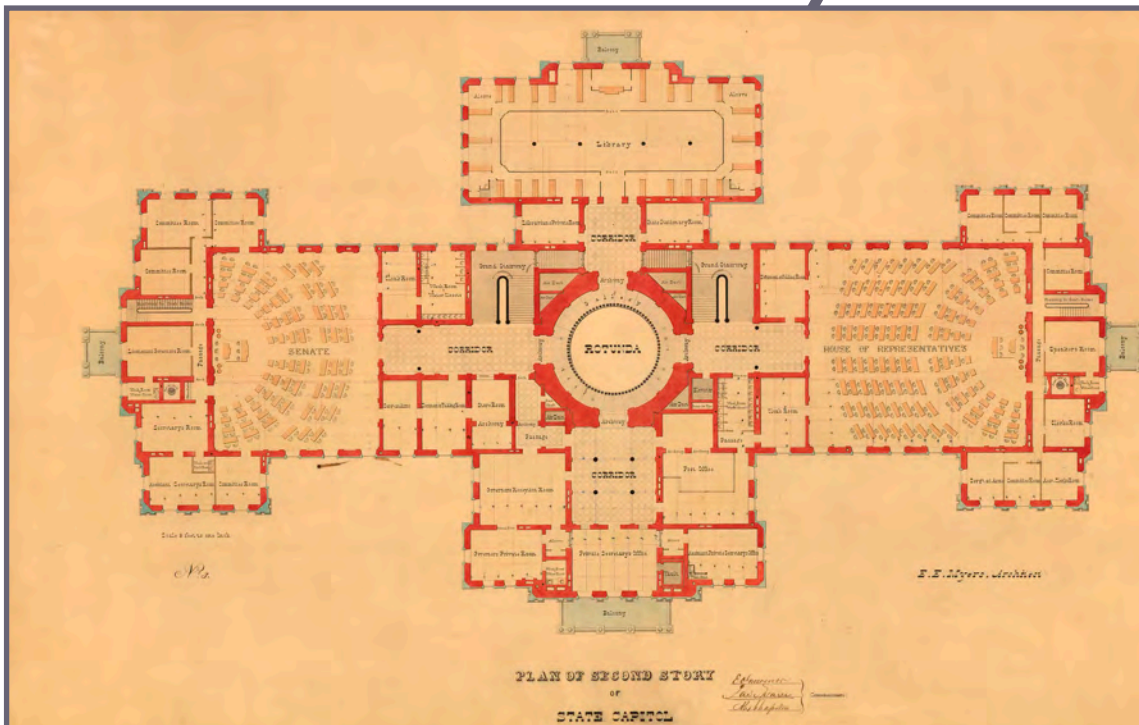
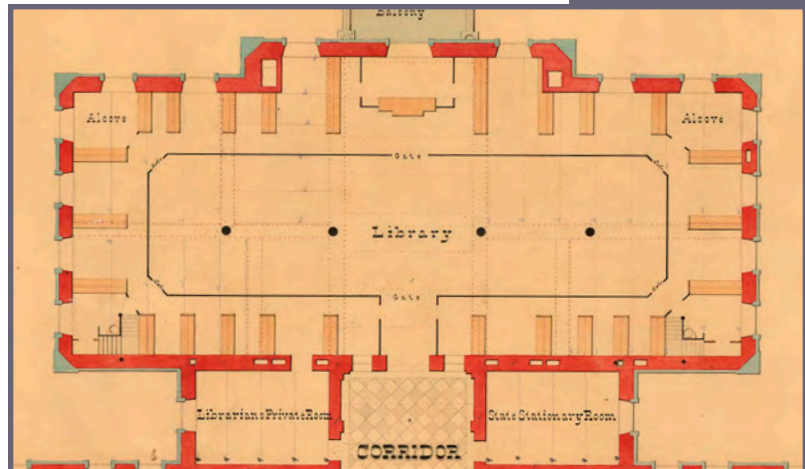
The Michigan State Capitol was built during the golden age of Capitol construction in the years following the American Civil War. From its inception, the building was designed to serve several functions and roles for the state. First, and most importantly, it is the official seat of government for the State of Michigan. It is a public forum where people can express their opinions, and a symbol of governmental traditions and the state itself. Yet the Capitol is also, at its very essence, an office building, where the day to day functions of government have played out for well over a century.

When the Capitol first opened in 1879, it was state government's only active office building, where all three branches of government were housed. The executive branch, including the Governor, State Treasurer, Secretary of State, State Librarian, Auditor General, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Adjutant General, claimed most of the rooms within it. The judicial branch was represented by the Supreme Court, which occupied offices and an elegant chamber in the east wing of the third floor. The legislative branch used the House and Senate chambers, the largest and most impressive rooms in the Capitol, as well as offices for the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, and a few committee rooms. There were no offices for individual legislators, who, when in Lansing for brief part-time legislative sessions, worked from their desks on the chamber floors.

The State Library and the State Stationary Room

The Capitol's west wing housed one of the largest and most architecturally interesting spaces in the building, the State Library. Founded in 1828 during the territorial period, the Library was home to roughly 30,000 volumes by the time it moved into the present Capitol building in 1878. Architect Elijah E. Myers provided the Library with a three story space capable of housing 100,000 volumes—a vast improvement over its previous crowded locations. The books stood neatly on custom walnut shelves located on the main (second) floor and four perimeter galleries overhead. A wonderful description of the space appeared in the 1879-1880 *Michigan Manual*:

“The State Library occupies the second, third, and fourth floors, with two intermediate galleries, in the west wing of the capitol. The dimensions of the rooms and galleries are as follows: 100 feet in length, 45 feet wide at the center, and open from main floor to ceiling, a height of 59 feet. The galleries and upper floors are attained by two spiral stairways which occupy the northeast and southeast corner of the room. The first and second floors and the galleries are also connected by a book elevator.



The Capitol's original hand inked floor plans still survive in the Archives of Michigan. The Library portion shows the location of each bookcase, alcove, washstand, and the Librarian's desk, situated opposite the main entrance and in front of the entrance to the west portico (or balcony).

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Michigan State Capitol Directory.

LEFT.	CENTRE.	RIGHT.
First Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Auditor General.		State Treasurer.
Board of Health.	WEST CORRIDOR.	Superintendent of
Commissioner of Railroads.		Public Instruction.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Auditor General.		Inspector General.
(Tax Department).		Adjutant General.
Commissioner of Insurance.		Quartermaster General.
Supt of State Property.	NORTH CORRIDOR.	
Board of Auditors.		Deputy Treasurer.
Secretary of State.		Land Office.
		Swamp Land Office.
Second Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Post Office.	Private Secretary.	Governor.
WEST CORRIDOR.		
State Library.		
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Senate Chamber.		
NORTH CORRIDOR.		
Representative Hall.		
Third Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Attorney Gen'l.	Justices' Rooms.	Supreme Court.
WEST CORRIDOR.		
Attorneys' Law Library.		Attorneys' Consultation Room.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Clerk of Supreme Court.		
Senate Gallery.		
NORTH CORRIDOR.		
Representative Hall Gallery.		
Fourth Floor.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Pioneers' Audience Room.		Pioneers' Office.
Reporter Supreme Court.		
WEST CORRIDOR.		
Library.		
Basement.		
EAST CORRIDOR.		
Board of State Charities.		Auditor's Working Rooms.
SOUTH CORRIDOR.		
Auditor's Working Rooms.		State Armory
Pomological Society.		and
State Board of Agriculture.		Military Store Rooms.
With Compliments of A. L. Burns, Superintendent of State Property.		

"The first two floors and the galleries contain 30 cases each, with shelf capacity for 80,000 volumes. The cases are arranged in pleasant, well-lighted alcoves. The first floor and gallery cases are provided with doors.

"The first floor is devoted to legislative, reference and miscellaneous works. The center of the room is inclosed [sic] with a neat iron balustrade running from the entrance door each way around the entire floor to the Librarian's desk, which occupies a point opposite the main entrance. Entrance to the alcoves is reached through eight iron gates. The Librarian's desk is a semi-hexagon. In the large alcove back of the Librarian's desk, is placed the working desk.

This early Capitol Directory survives in the Jenison Collection, a series of six scrapbooks compiled to record the Capitol's 1872-1878 construction by historian and collector O.A. Jenison.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

"The trusses in the second and third floors and the ceiling trusses are supported by four Corinthian pillars of three sections each: each section corresponding to the height of the story in

which it is placed. The base of each on the first floor is surrounded by a low desk 6x7 feet in size, furnished with extension drawers on either side to accommodate large volumes.

"The alcoves are furnished with desks, chairs, etc. for the use of those wishing a quiet place for study. The main floor is also furnished with a revolving book-case (for encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.), tables and chairs for the use of visitors.

"The numerous pictures hanging from the balustrade surrounding the gallery and the beautiful linoleum on the floor add much to the beauty of the Library.

"The furniture and cases in the entire Library are made of black walnut, beautifully designed and highly finished. There are also three electric clocks and numerous call bells.

"The Library is well lighted and ventilated. There are three chandeliers in the ceiling containing 25 burners each, and there are also 200 other burners.

"The Library, when fully furnished, will contain not less than 100,000 volumes."¹

The Library is well lighted and ventilated. There are three chandeliers in the ceiling containing 25 burners each, and there are also 200 other burners.

The first person to work in this magnificent space was Harriet Augusta Edgerton Tenney—the first woman appointed a State Officer (the equivalent of a modern department director) in Michigan. Governor H.P. Baldwin named Tenney Michigan's new State Librarian in 1869, making her only the third female State Librarian in the country. Originally from Vermont, Harriet embraced her library duties and more than doubled the collection during her twenty-two-year tenure. A self-described lover of books, she conducted exchanges with libraries around the English-speaking world, penned the Library's first card catalogue, moved the entire collection twice, and, in 1874, convinced the Legislature to establish the Michigan Pioneer Society, which operated a small historical museum in rooms on the east side of the Capitol's fourth floor for many years.

Perhaps not surprising, given its mission and nature, the Library left a substantial footprint in early records. In addition to the previously quoted lengthy description, the 1878-1879 *Michigan Manual* also contained a full list of rules for using the Library and its collection. Open six days a week, from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. during Legislative and Supreme Court sessions, the Library welcomed anyone, regardless of position or status, to visit, consult, and read the books and magazines held within, as long as the Librarian (or her assistant) was present. Only Legislative members and officers, State Officers and clerks, and Supreme Court Judges enjoyed the privilege of actually checking materials out—and even they had to promise to keep everything in Lansing, refrain from checking items out for other associates or friends, and return the volumes within two weeks. And, if anyone lost a book or failed to return it before the end of session, his or her pay would be docked to cover the cost of a replacement.²

The Library's second floor entrance was flanked by two small one-room offices. To the south stood the Librarian's private office, where she could retreat to catch up on her correspondence and write her biennial reports. The Stationary Room occupied the opposite (north) room (today identified as H251) where sitting legislators and other state officials could obtain letterhead, envelopes, and other stationary related materials. During the 1879 session the House kept a watchful eye on the use and cost of these materials. Each Representative could procure the equivalent of five dollars in stationary, whereas committees could draw supplies as needed. At the end of January, the House accepted a monthly report noting a broad range of stationary usage, from the \$.05 expended by the Agricultural College Committee to the much larger \$176.64 bill from the Committee on Supplies and Expenditures.³



A view of the new State Library from the second floor, circa 1879. Corinthian cast iron columns supported iron beams that ran through the open center of the room at the third and fourth floor levels. These beams supported the weight of the balconies and bookshelves bordering the room on the upper floors.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

Early Changes

As might be expected, changes in the Library, the Librarian's Office, the Stationary Room, and the Capitol in general, were constant. Two major improvements were launched in the 1880s, only a few years after the building opened. First, starting in 1885, electricians began wiring the Capitol for a new technology—electric lights. Prior to this, the Capitol was lighted entirely by gas fixtures. That same year, painters began to decorate the Capitol's plain white plaster walls with an array of rich colors and ornate designs. Slowly, every room, including those in the west wing, was transformed by artists who stenciled, grained, marbled, and striped beautiful motifs on the walls and ceilings.

In 1892, the State Board of Auditors directed the Superintendent of the Capitol to survey the building and its contents. He recorded his findings in their annual bound report, which survives to this day. Not surprisingly, the Library portion of the survey reveals a room packed with dozens of book cases, cabinets, one catalogue case, four atlas cases, tables of various sizes, chairs, several pairs of steps, ink stands, waste baskets, umbrella stands, cuspidors (spittoons), and one large iron mail box.⁴ In contrast, the small Librarian's Office contained one walnut wardrobe, filing cases, five chairs, a desk, one small table, three pairs of steps, one cloth upholstered couch, one carpet, four rugs, one waste basket, one cuspidor, an iron umbrella stand, and an electric clock. The Stationary Room doesn't appear in the survey, suggesting it was quickly reused for a different purpose.

During this period, the following State Librarians worked in this west wing space:⁵

1869-1891	Harriet A. Tenney	1893-1923	Mary C. Spencer
1891-1893	Margaret C. Calhoun		

The Twentieth Century

The State Library experienced unprecedented growth under the visionary leadership of Mary C. Spencer, Tenney's protégé, who led the institution for thirty years. In 1895, Spencer successfully lobbied the Legislature to dramatically expand services across Michigan through two new programs: traveling libraries and associate libraries. Each traveling library consisted of an oak box filled with about fifty different titles. The State Library packed and shipped these crates across the state to rural communities, organizations, clubs, and schools



State Librarian Mary Spencer and her staff posed for this photograph in 1895. In addition to books, the Library also collected art, including prints and etchings of famous American and Michigan citizens and political figures.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

until they were providing, by 1902, over 16,000 patrons access to some 74,000 books. The associate library program formed alliances between the State Library and public libraries holding at least 1,000 books across the state. Upon becoming an associate library, institutions gained the right to draw books from the State's collection (now fully open to the public), obtain training on basic library skills and services, and receive shipments of free state government documents.⁶ Over one hundred years later, the fruits of these programs still endure.

This photograph, taken sometime in the 1920s, provides a view of the second floor Law Library from the mezzanine balcony. Three men, presumably the Law Librarian and his assistants, gaze up from the center of the room.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

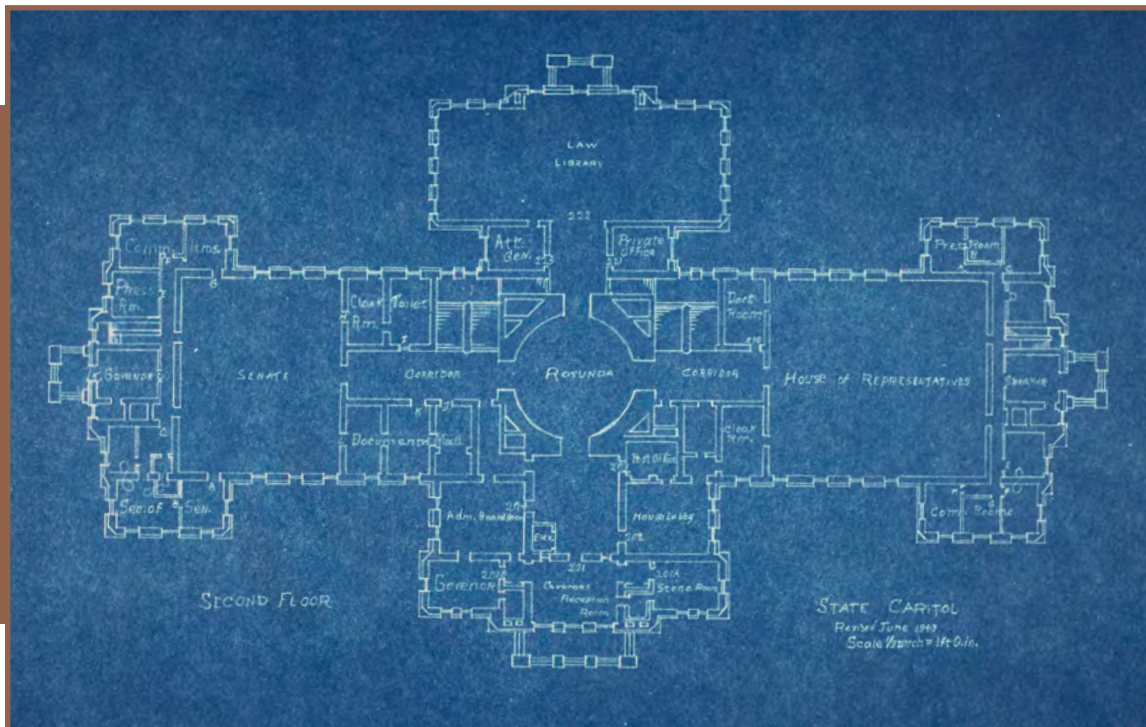


And as the programs grew, so did the collections. By the turn of the century new proposals for additions to the Capitol or the construction of a new state office building sprang up regularly—and nearly all of them included a larger home for the Library, which now contained about 300,000 volumes. Finally, in 1916, the Michigan Library Association issued a report that caught the attention of the legislature. “‘The committee made a tour of the capitol library yesterday,’ said Mr. Ranck . . . ‘and the horrible conditions that we find on the top floor are a menace to life, a menace to the valuable collection of historical books, and a menace to the entire property itself.’” Six years later, in 1922, the Library moved into a new, more accommodating—if less attractive—home in the aptly named State Office Building (now known as the Elliott-Larsen Office Building).⁷

Yet not everything in the Library's collection left the Capitol. The State Library was, after all, still tasked with serving the Legislature, the Supreme Court, and State Departments. Ignoring Spencer's pleas that the collection remain intact, the Legislature broke off the Legal and Legislative Reference Service divisions and relocated them from the third to the second floor, where they occupied all three rooms in the west wing.⁸

By the 1940s, space in the increasingly crowded Capitol was at a premium. Only the largest, most powerful parts of government, including the Attorney General's Office and the House of Representatives (who used the Private Office on the right) continued to work in the building.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan



The next time these rooms appear in the known historical record is in 1941, when the State Treasurer's office surveyed the Capitol and inventoried the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines in the building. The accompanying floor plans identify the Law Library as room 222, in which three people worked. Room 221, the space to the immediate north of the Library, served as an office for two House Bill Writers, who used two desks, one table, four files, and three bookcases. To the south, the Attorney General used Room 223 as a Reference Room, where three people worked using two desks, one table, and three files.¹⁰

Two years later, Treasury repeated the exercise. This time they included not only the number of people, pieces of furniture, and machines housed in each office in 1943, but also in 1940. The assignments of the rooms remained consistent, though the number of people working in them changed slightly. Three people continued to staff the Law Library, which was "Full" of bookcases. The Attorney General's Reference Room lost one tenant (perhaps due to the war) but gained several bookcases. In contrast, the number of people working in the House Bill Writing room increased by one for a total of three staffers, who shared their space with eight bookcases, twelve files, one table, and three desks.¹¹

In 1957, architect George R. Page prepared another set of mid-twentieth-century drawings for the Buildings and Construction Division of the Michigan State Administrative Board. Page's drawings indicate that the tenancy of the west wing remained unchanged. The three rooms now bore new identifiers—205 for the Bill Drafting Room, 206 for the Law Library, and 207 for the Attorney General's Reference Room.¹²

The Law Library evolved into an interesting blend of the old and new, as seen in this circa 1960 photograph. Some features, like the structural columns, balcony rails, and bookcases survived because they were built into the very room. Other features, like the lights, were easier to replace and modernize.

Image Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan

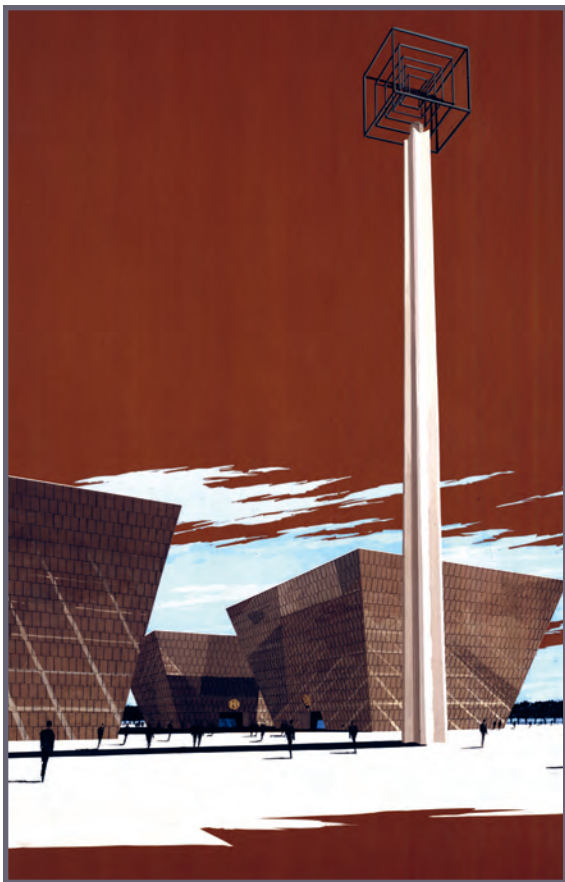


The Legislature Moves In

The late 1960s and early 1970s were times of great change in the Capitol building. After ninety years of shuffling, squeezing, and relocating, the decision was made to dramatically remodel many of the offices in the Capitol. The action was motivated by a number of factors, including the state's move to a full-time legislature. This had dramatic repercussions for the Capitol building, where the pace of business in both House and Senate spaces increased significantly. As the number of legislators spending every week in Lansing rose, the call for additional office space reached a fever pitch. In order to accommodate all of these members, space had to be found—preferably in the Capitol. Governor Romney's preferred solution called for the construction of a new Capitol. While significant steps were taken towards this ambitious goal, ultimately the project was tabled over cost and aesthetic concerns

Several of the plans considered for the new Capitol in the 1960s contained three buildings—designed to house and symbolize the three branches of government—and a central pylon.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection



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When it became clear that a new Capitol was not to be, another solution was proposed. Why not reconfigure the Capitol's offices and committee rooms? The timing seemed ideal, as several of the building's longtime occupants, including the Attorney General, the Supreme Court, and the Law Library, were moving out of the Capitol and into other buildings in downtown Lansing.



Inspired, perhaps, in part by the Law Library's mezzanine balcony, a scheme was developed to capture new space in the old building by subdividing the rooms in half to create two ten-foot tall offices, one above the other. From 1969 to 1972, almost every office on the Capitol's first, second, and third floors received an overfloor (sometimes called half floors or mezzanines). At the same time, offices and the old Law Library were modernized by adding drop ceilings, fluorescent lighting, and institutional carpeting and furnishings. Original decorative paint had already been covered by layers of overpaint, paneling, and wallpaper. Almost every vestige of the Capitol's original elegance and character had disappeared.

Offices, corridors, and even the lobby into the House Chamber, seen here, were sliced in half horizontally to create additional office space in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

By the early 1970s, the space formerly home to the old State Library was overfloored and cut into more than twenty separate work areas between the second floor and its corresponding overfloor. Over the next two decades upwards of two dozen House members spent each session working together in tightly packed, contemporary cubicles. Officeholders of this era speak of the space as being mazelike, with extra walls, partitions, and desks around every corner.

*By the early 1970s, the space formerly home to the old
State Library was overfloored . . .*

About the same time, a new tenant moved into the old State Librarian's Office on the south side of the hall—Legislative Nurse Margaret Zirbes. Believed to be the first and only person to hold this position, Zirbes had previously worked as a public health nurse in Ingham County for thirty-four years. Described in a 1975 newspaper article as “An energetic, 75-year-old birdlike bundle of energy is the Legislature's Florence Nightengale . . .” Zirbes was a popular Capitol figure who dispensed lemonade, iced tea, donuts, homemade lemon poppyseed cake, over-the-counter medications, and first aid supplies to members of the legislature and their staffs.

The northern end of the Library was partitioned and turned into an office during the Capitol's restoration.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

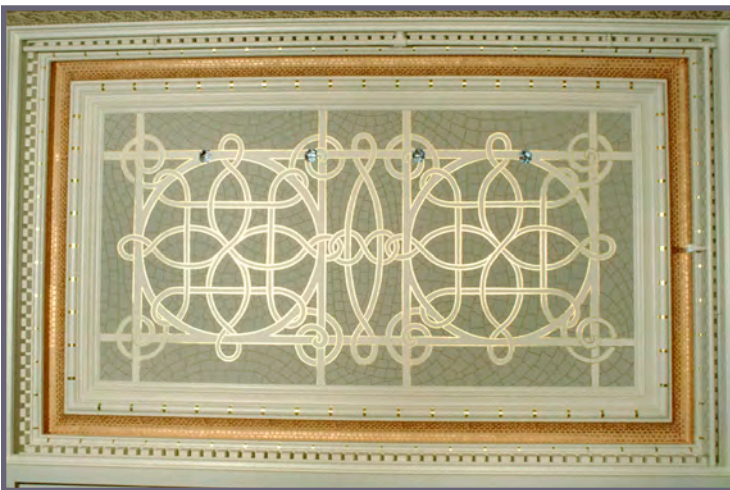


The Capitol's Restoration

In 1987, the Michigan Senate and the House of Representatives began the process of restoring Michigan's Capitol. Chief among their goals was to return the building to its original Victorian grandeur while modernizing the many outdated systems within it. They sought to make the Capitol a living, working museum, where the functions of government would continue to play out in a beautiful and inspiring historical setting. In order to carry out this mission, the restoration team, made up of supportive elected officials, architects, craftspeople, and artists, would need to touch every single space in the Capitol, including the old State Library.

Fully restoring the old Library, however, simply wasn't practical. After much study and discussion, preservation architects recommended retaining the floors at the second, third, and fourth levels, while removing all the associated overfloors. Next, the large spaces were subdivided into a limited number of offices and committee and meetings rooms that incorporated original architectural details, including the beautiful, structural cast iron Corinthian columns. Finally, decorative finishes originally found in the main portions of the Library were carried through all three levels, hinting at their shared past.

*The restoration
of the Capitol
was completed
in the fall of
1992.*



Decorative painters recreated the original mosaic and knot pattern found on the underside of the Library's balconies throughout the west wing. This motif ties together the offices and rooms on the second, third, and fourth floor.

Image Courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Commission

The restoration also brought with it the need to upgrade the Capitol's fire exits. Until this point, the building relied on unsightly and dangerous exterior fire escapes attached to the stonework. One of the goals of the restoration was to increase safety systems in the Capitol, including installing interior fire stairs for the first time. This became an engineering nightmare, as there was simply no place to put them. After carefully studying floor plans, the restoration team decided to place one of two new interior fire exits in the southernmost room of the west wing. In a rather remarkable feat of deconstruction, a vertical shaft was opened that extended from the top of the building to the bottom for the new stairs.

Other changes came quickly. Tradespeople removed suspended ceilings and rerouted and disguised ductwork, wiring, and sprinkler heads. Appropriate carpeting, designed using colors and patterns from the Victorian era, and period inspired furnishings, were crafted and installed. Skilled designers and craftspeople used photographs to recreate original gas lighting fixtures removed in the early twentieth century. New windows, neatly trimmed with appropriate wood shutters and draperies, replaced old.

Of particular importance to the restoration was the recreation of the Capitol's historic decorative artwork. Michigan's Capitol contains approximately nine acres of hand painted art. A variety of techniques were used in the building when it was decorated in the 1880s, including stenciling, striping, marbling, and gilding. Over the years, the artwork was painted over many times as styles changed. For the first time, careful research was undertaken to determine the original colors and decorative paint motifs found in these rooms. These colors and motifs were then replicated by talented decorative artists who used traditional techniques to return the room to a proper late nineteenth century appearance.

*Michigan's Capitol contains approximately
nine acres of hand painted art.*

One of the techniques used in this space is that of woodgraining. The original Capitol building commissioners made the decision to use white pine as the dominant wood throughout the building. White pine was relatively inexpensive and available in abundance in this period. They did not intend, however, for people to recognize the wood as pine. Once the pine was installed, it was woodgrained—that is, painted carefully to mimic a more expensive wood—by talented artists. In the Capitol, painters transformed yards of humble pine by painting it with the grain of walnut, the most fashionable (and therefore rather expensive) choice of the 1870s. The technique that they used was replicated by modern decorative painters during the restoration. They labored many hours to apply the necessary seven layers of paint needed to mimic the late nineteenth century process.

The restoration of the Capitol was completed in the fall of 1992. Rededication ceremonies held on November 19 and 20 of that year celebrated the success of the project, which won many significant state and national preservation awards. That same fall, the building was officially designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor accorded historic structures in America.

Post Restoration Use

The completion of the Capitol's restoration brought with it the need to resolve matters concerning the identification and future use of the Capitol's rooms, including this suite, which now serves as the office of the House Speaker Pro Tempore. A new numbering system, devised by Capitol Preservation Architect Richard C. Frank, was introduced indicating the ownership of the space (House, Senate, Executive, etc.) and the room's number. Today the modern suite consists of rooms H251, H251A, H251B, H251C, H251D, and H251E.

The following members have served in this suite since the Capitol's restoration:

1993-1994	Rep. Robert Bender	87th District	Middleville	Rm. H251
	Rep. Shirley Johnson	41st District	Royal Oak	Rm. H251
1995-1996	Rep. Jan C. Dolan	37th District	Farmington Hills	Rm. H251
	Rep. Shirley Johnson	41st District	Royal Oak	Rm. H251
1997-1998	Rep. Paul T. Baade	91st District	Muskegon	Rm. H251
	Rep. Lynn F. Owen	56th District	Newport	Rm. H251
1999	Rep. Gerald H. Law	20th District	Plymouth	Rm. H251
	Rep. Andrew Richner	1st District	Grosse Pointe Park	Rm. H251
1999-2000	Rep. Patricia L. Birkholz	88th District	Saugatuck	Rm. H251 ¹³
2001-2002	Rep. Patricia L. Birkholz	88th District	Saugatuck	Rm. H251
2003-2004	Rep. Larry Julian	85th District	Lennon	Rm. H251
2005-2006	Rep. Jerry O. Kooiman	75th District	Grand Rapids	Rm. H251
2007-2008	Rep. Michael G. Sak	76th District	Grand Rapids	Rm. H251
2009-2010	Rep. Pam Byrnes	52nd District	Chelsea	Rm. H251
2011-2012	Rep. John Walsh	19th District	Livonia	Rm. H251
2013-2014	Rep. John Walsh	19th District	Livonia	Rm. H251
2015-2016	Rep. Tom Leonard	93rd District	Lansing	Rm. H251
2017-2018	Rep. Lee Chatfield	107th District	Levering	Rm. H251
2019-2020	Rep. Jason Wentworth	97th District	Clare	Rm. H251

End Notes

- 1 *The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 373.
- 2 *The Red Book for the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Michigan*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 374.
- 3 *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Michigan 1879*. W.S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1879, p. 265-266.
- 4 *Annual Report of the Board of State Auditors for the State of Michigan for the Year 1892*. Robert Smith & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1892, p. 517-518.
- 5 Bartlett, Bernadette M. "Serving Michigan since 1828 . . . 'Michigan's State Library.'" *Wayne State University*, 2000.
- 6 Bartlett, Bernadette M. "Serving Michigan since 1828 . . . 'Michigan's State Library.'" *Wayne State University*, 2000.
- 7 "State Library is Menace to Workers' Lives," *Lansing State Journal*, October 12, 1916.
- 8 "Work of Moving Nearly 180,000 Books in State Library Nearing Completion," *Lansing State Journal*, March 13, 1922.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1941.
- 11 State of Michigan, Department of Treasury. "Capitol Space and Contents Survey," 1943.
- 12 State of Michigan, Michigan State Administrative Board Buildings and Construction Division. "Capitol Survey," George R. Page, 1957.
- 13 In 1999 the House of Representatives moved into the new Cora Reynolds Anderson House Office Building. That fall, both members working in H251 moved into their new HOB offices. Under the direction of Speaker Chuck Perricone, the Speaker Pro Tempore, Patricia Birkholz, moved into H251, which subsequently became the Speaker Pro Tempore's Office. Per an interview with House Business Manager Doug Simon on August 21, 2018.



Capitol.Michigan.gov